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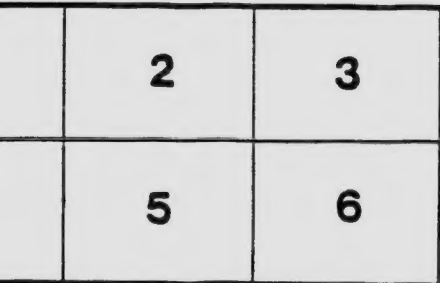
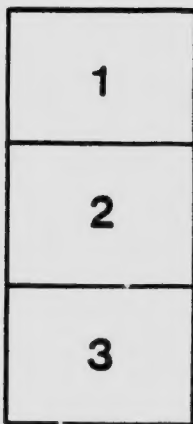
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THE MICMAC TERCENTENARY

BY
JOHN M. CLARKE

FROM THE EIGHTH REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE
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THE MICMAC TERCENTENARY

By JOHN M. CLARKE

Recent years have given us a freshet of historic anniversaries. We are swinging through lustra laden with memories of events which subtend large angles in our destinies. We are not to be allowed to forget these, the crucibles in which we were refined. But amid these larger occasions, now and again some event of lesser note in our records strikes its anniversary, graciously salutes its own community or its beneficiaries and takes up again its little orbit.

It is one of these seemingly minor commemorations, now no longer new and so perhaps no longer news, to which, as an interested participant, I desire to refer before the event passes too far out of reach: the Micmac Tercentenary, held at Ristigouche, Province of Quebec, June 24, 1910. It has not received the public notice to which it is entitled and the occasion to remind ourselves of its significance should not be idly let pass.¹

The date was not haphazard, nor was the place. On June 24, 1610, Membertou, grand chief of the tribe of Micmac Indians, with twenty-one of his people, was baptised into the faith by Father Jesse Fleché at Port Royal (Annapolis, Nova Scotia); and June 24, 1910, at the Capuchin mission on the Micmac reservation at Ristigouche, by the invitation of the Reverend Father Pacifique, special missionary to these Indians, chiefs, councilors and captains of the tribe, with many high dignitaries of the church, assembled to commemorate this ancient event and momentous occurrence in the history of these people. The reverend priest who organized this successful commemoration kept in the foreground its spiritual significance. The occasion was largely a religious one but still one fraught with very real historical and ethnological significance.

The event which this interesting celebration commemorated was not one that excited in its day much comment or notice from contemporary historians. We know from a few records little else than the simple fact stated above. It may be found in Lescarbot's

¹ The writer attended this interesting fête as a delegate from the Education Department and the New York Historical Assoc.

Relation Dernière and in a letter addressed by an eye witness named Bertrand to the *Sieur de la Tronchaie*.¹

We need not take this occasion to review Parkman's rather austere and injudicial portrayal of Pontrincourt's zealous efforts to bring the aged Chief Membertou and his tribe into the church. The deed was done in fervor; whether it was done to anticipate the Jesuits in the same field, matters little now. The baptism at Port Royal stands as the achievement of a conviction supported by resolution, the combination that has always done things that are worth while. The old chief, having given his adherence to the new religion, instilled his faith into all his tribe, perhaps whether they liked it or not, until all the Micmacs under his control had surrendered fully to the new religion. And thus at Annapolis began the spiritual regeneration of the tribe till, under the labors of the "Black-robcs" and the "Bare-feet" alike, it extended throughout the entire domain of the Micmacs in Acadia and Gaspesia. However historians, in the conventual repose of their libraries, may construe the initial effort, the seed was planted and the occasion of June 1910 showed something of the harvest.

There was a far deeper meaning to this event — one which it was not the purpose of the tercentenary to commemorate and was obviously omitted, but it has stamped an elemental influence on the history of this western continent. The Micmacs were the first of the American Indians to surrender to the white man's religion.

¹ The latter is quoted by R. F. Pacifique in a souvenir brochure issued in advance of the tercentennial: "*Une Tribu privilégiée*" — an illuminating and erudite history of the tribe and a sympathetic analysis of the Micmac psychology. This pamphlet is itself an important historical document, for its author is, of all men, he who doubtless knows the Micmac people best, has sojourned with them most, has received their confidences, soothed their anxieties, advised them in their spiritual and secular interests oftenest. For them he has printed prayer books, hymnaries and catechisms in their own language and today issues a monthly journal, "*Le Messager Micmac*," in their tongue. Thus incidentally to his spiritual labors he has rendered a great service to philology and linguistics in helping to conserve this Souriquois language. It is surely upon this learned and devout Franciscan that the mantle of his confrère, LeClercq, the intrepid missionary to the "Savages" in the Gaspé peninsula in the 1600's, when the country was wild and they were wilder, has fallen. He has succeeded to the labors of the devoted Biard and Maillard. To the publication we have referred and to his later "*Souvenir*" of the tercentenary, the writer (or indeed any writer on this theme) must perforce be attentive and from them a constant borrower.

That meant a bond offensive and defensive with the Frenchman who had instilled the new faith. If by the chance of adventure, of geography or of discovery these Indians had been Iroquois instead of the bitterest enemies of that great Confederacy, the whole course of American history would have run in a very different channel. But with the conversion of Membertou and his tribe to the faith of the Frenchman, the die was cast. Mutual and historic enmities alined themselves. The Micmacs first (the Souriquois, as the early French called them), and then in the logical sequence of time the entire Algonquin stock of which they formed a branch, became the allies of the one culture; their enemies, the Iroquois, by very grace of this fact, became the enemies of that culture, and no effort of colonization, of treaty, of conversion (though none was spared) ever could turn the scales the other way. The great Confederacy of the Six Nations, holding the apex of the critical triangle in New York at which converged the St Lawrence pathway of the French and the Hudson-Mohawk pathway of the English, held the balance of power between the two. If we analyze our history down to its roots it is perfectly right to look back on the conversion of Membertou, his squaw, his children, his children's children and his tribe as the first step toward the ultimate supremacy of the English culture in America.

The student of Indian ethnology may look upon the Micmacs as only a little tribe, of small moment in the sum of aboriginal history, but, spread out along the northeastern shores of the Atlantic, they were the first of all American Indians to come in close contact with the whites, and today they are the only Indian tribe in all America that has held its own in numbers; its members are as many as when the Europeans first saw them. In this statement there are, of course, only the estimates of the early missionaries, LeClercq and Biard, to guide us, but the fact seems well established. Father LeClercq, laboring in Gaspé, the northern reaches of their hunting grounds where their number was always few, thought in 1680 that his "Gaspesians" numbered no more than 500, but Biard at an earlier date (1611) and nearer the center of their settlements in Acadia, estimated them at 3000 to 3500. In 1871 Hannay in his history of Acadia, placed the number at "nearly 3000" and adds "it is doubtful if their numbers were ever much greater." Dr Dionne, the distinguished historian of Quebec, says that in 1891 the Micmacs numbered 4108; Father Pacifique in 1902 made a personal enumeration of the tribe and placed the number at 3850.

in Canada and 200 in Newfoundland. Today according to Father Pacifique and the last official census there are 4319 members of the tribe, of whom only 230 live in Newfoundland and about 15 in the United States.

It is thus very evident that the tribe has been one of extraordinary vitality and has perpetuated itself and even multiplied in the face of much the same conditions which brought about the depopulation of every other aboriginal people of this hemisphere. Some ethnologist with the proper psychological equipment might well seek out the causes of this phenomenon. Evidently somewhere in their composition or their environment, by nature or by grace, there has lain a resistant virtue which other tribes have missed, though both by nature and grace, their lands have not greatly invited the white man's lust.

It is not that these Indians have increased by excessive mixture with the whites. This tendency to intermarriage has never been general among the people nor has it essentially modified their physical type. On the other hand, one can not fail of being impressed with the perfection of the physiognomy and the sturdiness of the physique in all the better men of the tribe. Father Pacifique says:

"It is true there have been many crosses, legitimate and illegitimate, but in a few generations the type will be fully restored. I have observed that the last children of mixed families are less white than the first born. Moreover their attachment to their beautiful language is a guaranty of cohesion and permanence."

The learned father has here noted a Mendelian factor of ultimate force in insuring a stable or aboriginal type from variation, and which is quite sure, in the mixture of races, eventually to dominate the secondary or derived type represented in this case by the whites.

The Micmacs, too, hold to their original soil. Too many of our aborigines have been shifted about, the shuttlecock of the white man's designs, and find themselves today far away from their old hunting grounds. The Micmac country was the extreme orient of the Algonquins, and in the historic confederacy of this Algic stock which once covered half the continent, they were the "youngest brother," their land *Migmagig*, the "country of friendship." The "elder brother" was the Abenaki to the south and west, while the "father tribe" was the Ottawa, their land the "land of their origin."

The tribe is scattered as in the days of Cartier, and spreads through the region over which Nicolas Denys held patent as lieutenant governor in 1658 from "the Cap de Campseaux as far as the Cap des Roziers." There are fifty-six small settlements or reservations scattered all the way from the Gaspé peninsula to Cape Breton, the largest of all being at Ristigouche, the seat of the Capuchin monastery and church of St Ann and the metropolis of the tribe, where they number 506. Their segregation into widely scattered but numerous settlements is unusual in the present disposition of the Indian tribes and might seem to expose them, by the very fact of freer contact with the whites, to variation and change. They speak the French in French communities and the English in English, but for business purposes only. Among themselves their own language alone is spoken and without variations, no matter how wide apart their homes may be. "It is certain that the race is not disappearing either by extinction or by absorption" (F. P.). This fact is all the more noteworthy because these Indians have been in no wise exempt from the curse of alcohol,¹ tuberculosis and syphilis. These evils have played havoc here, as they have and do today elsewhere among the aborigines. It may be that their general poverty (for there is a total absence among them of the occasional prosperity one sees among the other tribes) and their ignorance of hygienic living will eventually make inroads on their vitality which the life out of doors may not be able to combat — and here lies at the hand of their legal guardians and of their white neighbors an immediate duty.

I could not venture to write even in summary the part the Micmac tribe has played in history. It is knit close to the story of early French settlement of Acadia. The enmities of the French were ever its enmities, and this hostility to the English was not based on religious grounds alone. The difference in the attitude of the French and the English toward the Indians is of common knowledge. By the French they were never regarded as subjects of the French king so much as his wards and so by the French clergy they were ever treated not only with gentleness but with

¹ Long ago Denys painted in vivid colors the fearful effects of the Frenchman's liquor on these savages. For this, in those days of the 1600's, they spent their very lives; all the spoils of the winter's hunt were exchanged for liquor and the summer was one long debauch till the fishermen sailed away from the coast. All this has passed and yet today with them, as with all the aborigines, firewater makes the Indian into a savage again and brings out to the surface all that religion has helped to bury.

prudence. The French missionaries found them in their simple-minded naturalness and though their spiritual labors were slow of fruitage,¹ the hardship was intensely magnified by the incursions of the English. One who would realize this may well read the account given by LeClerc of the burning of his churches and missions by the "Bastonnais" (Phips). So through the early history of Acadia they were friendly neighbors to the French, and with the English conquest they submitted, not without some hesitation, to the changed régime, and made their allegiance to the new sovereign. When the American war came on efforts were made through the King of France to induce them to revolt against the English, but the advances of Count d'Estaing and Commander Preble were sternly rejected in forcible terms.²

Today they are loyal and the most ancient of all Canadians.

¹ LeClerc in Gaspé more than once speaks of the discouragements of his task and finally begged of his superior to be relieved of further efforts to convert the Gaspeians.

² Chief Jerome of Ristigouche exhibited on the occasion of the tercentenary a copy of a "Déclaration au nom du roi, à tous les anciens Français de l'Amerique Septentrionale" printed on board the *Languedoc* in Boston harbor October 18, 1778. At the bottom of the first page is written by hand: "A mon cher Frère Joseph Claude et autres sauvages Mickmacks. De la part de Monsieur le Comte d'Estaing, Vice-Amiral de France, Holker, agent general de la marine et consul de la Nation française."

With the rest of the settlers of the St Lawrence coasts, the Micmacs had learned to dread the repeated invasions throughout the old régime, which took their start from Boston. The "Bastonnais" were well hated and not a little feared, so that in time the term became of common application to all the English. I think the term is not quite extinct—at any rate I have heard a French fisherman call a rather disagreeable American tourist in Gaspé a **Bastonnais**, with all the old feeling that the epithet must once have carried. Even yet, to the Micmac, the States is the country of the *Bastonnais*, and on his map of the world the whole area of the United States is called "Poston." Thus the evil that men do lives after them and Boston is by merit raised to this eminence.

The ancient traditionary fears of the gentle-minded Micmac had a curious illustration on the occasion of the tercentenary. While the Indians were gathered in the church for the opening ceremony on the morning of the first of the three days, some mischievous miscreant circulated the story that their old enemies the Iroquois, having heard of this assemblage, were lying in the woods outside ready to take advantage of their helpless state and fall upon them. After the mass and the sermon by the missionary, there appeared a growing restiveness among some of the Indians, whispers and awed looks spread through the pews, and these were not wholly dispelled till the wise and patriarchal Grand Chief had assured his people that such a story could only be the invention of the father of lies.

The interesting commemoration gives rise, in my mind, to reflections on a well-worn and ever present theme — the attitude of the white master toward the Indian. Perhaps as a titular official of the Iroquois League the writer may have had opportunity to acquire a right to this expression: There is one perfectly evident inference from the apparent motives and the actual dealings of the French and English cultures with their red allies, whether expressed in provincial, state or federal attitude; the French would ever let the red man be a red man; the English would make the red man into a white man. That is the situation succinctly stated. It would be just to go further and put the statement thus: that Canada would let the red man develop along lines of least resistance, while America has ever insisted and is still insisting on at once turning the red man white. The problem has worked its way along further in the older east than in the newer west.

I fancy we may not ascribe to the founders of our governments on either side the line any profound recognition of natural law, but it has certainly so happened that French Canada and French influences in Canada have been content to grant the fundamental difference in culture and to leave the Indian to come up slowly from his barbaric state under a spiritual rather than a civic impetus. It is thus the natural law works — slowly, if effectively. A great abyss in nature, profoundly divergent lines of culture meeting at their start but standing wide apart at the extremes, can not be jumped by legislative enactment. Lines of racial development, one following far behind the other, can not be brought together by the process of legislative stretching. The law that says red is white has either a fool or a knave for its author. Just as little can great monetary foundations designed to effect immediate alterations in the slow but orderly procedure of natural law — such as the development of language or the establishment of universal peace — escape the conditions which that law imposes. The supremacy of a law which lies above the statute and the common law is a fact which statute makers and statesmen have been slow to learn; experience is full witness to this. The English attitude toward the American Indian has never once suggested the concession that the Indian has just as much right on this earth as he, and has played just as significant a part in human progress. To the English colonists and the ideas they have left alive, the red man is a potential citizen as soon as he can be forced to measure up to

certain more or less artificial conditions of education and deportment.¹

French Canada assumed from the outset that the gap between the Indian and the Frenchman was the chasm between a primitive and advanced culture which only the slow process of time could bridge—it seemed to recall the ages which had been necessary for the Frenchman himself to come up from a like aboriginal condition. At any rate what the Catholic pioneers of New France saw in the Indian and what their successors still see is that the Indian has a soul to save. To bring him to adjust his natural religion to the more adequate conceptions of Catholicism was the purpose of the majestic and sublime sacrifices which so brilliantly illumine the pages of the old régime. No judicial mind can contemplate the results of Catholic and Protestant missionary endeavor among the American Indians and avoid the conclusion that the Catholic Indians have on the whole preserved their physical aboriginal type in greater perfection, have kept much of their tribal culture, possess a deeper religious conviction. Among the Protestant Indians there are many instances of individual attainment of noteworthy excellence in education, public usefulness and personal uprightness, but it is perfectly evident that the term Protestant as applied in some of the Indian tribes does not mean Christianized, so much as it implies an avowal and allegiance to a given form of religious worship, and in many cases, little else. My own personal observation is restricted to neither class, and I believe there is good reason for saying that, broadly, in matters of faith the Catholic Indian is a Catholic while the Protestant Indian is an Indian. It is an important fact in its historical bearings that the tribes which have been subjected to the most direct and persistent Protestant effort have never fully surrendered their natural religion. Indeed among the Iroquois of New York and Canada there are two very distinct interests in the League represented by the "Christians" and the "pagans."² So far as my knowledge goes, this is not at all the condition among tribes acknowledging allegiance to the Catholic church.

¹ In the condition of the Six Nations Indians in Canada and New York, there is a contrast, either creditable to the one government or discreditable to the other. Canada has let its Iroquois work out their own salvation and these Indians today are well educated, energetic, aggressive and fairly prosperous. In New York the reports of 1910 show that more than one-third (35.5 per cent) are illiterate.

² The Canadian Oneidas have now gone back to paganism after years of Protestant missionary labors.

We have already said that the conversion of the Micmacs was an elemental and influential factor in the historic conflict of English and French cultures on this continent. We are not likely to exaggerate its importance, whichever way the tides of events turned. It would be unfair and historically inaccurate to say that the influence of the Grand Chief Membertou on the Micmac tribe, allied with the efforts of the devoted French missionaries, finds its counterpoise in the single personal hold of Sir William Johnson who by force of his own personality kept back the Iroquois from alliance with the French. The two opposed facts are of different magnitude and unlike in quality, but similar in their antagonistic effect. Let us give to this historic event of 1610 all its true meaning in the century-long struggle between the French and English cultures. That struggle took its final direction in the contest for this continent, and the spectacular victories of Amherst and Hardy and Wolfe were made possible only by the strong hand of His British Majesty's Indian Agent, which held back the Iroquois from the French interests.

